
OPINION

Presidents Call For More Doctors

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Japan's leading medical doctors (MDs) can double their salaries by joining Pharma companies.

For many doctors, however, the lure of bigger money is not the only reason for this major career shift. Many want to use their skills to help more patients through the development of new medicines. Pharmaceutical company MDs engage in scientific discussions with opinion leaders from the world's top universities and through this important work can be part of major medical breakthroughs. Doctors are also attracted to a Monday-to-Friday working week, which allows them to spend more time with families. There are no more night duties or midnight pager calls.

Over the past several years there has been a steady flow of MDs joining the ranks of the Japanese pharmaceutical industry. It is a big decision for these people, considering the Japanese medical industry is steeped in tradition and there is a strict hierarchical honor between professor and student. For some, the thought of working for a Pharma company is too abstract, however many men and women are seeking a new career option because Pharma companies offer an exciting opportunity that is not limited by a therapeutic area or geographic location.

Doctors are in big demand. When asked about the importance of the role MDs play within pharmaceutical companies, a leading Pharma company president told a recent Tokyo conference.

"They can say three words that know one else can, 'in my practice'"

This simple phrase echoed powerfully through the conference room and was greeted by thoughtful nods and reflective gazes. The faces of the presidents said "we need more doctors".

One of the most common complaints of physicians is that medical representatives (MRs) are not 'adding any value' to the products they sell. Many physicians believe the attitude of many MRs is only to sell their product and quickly move on. Physicians are expecting more knowledge and insight from MRs, not just empty sales talk.

There are more than 45,000 MRs in Japan making more than a 100 million calls a year at a cost of more than 10,000 yen per call. This adds up to 1 trillion yen per year or 14% of Japanese industry 2004 revenues (7.2 trillion yen) Total cost of 1 Trillion Yen (Source: Industry, Japan Detailing Index). With all these calls and all this money spent, the knowledge of a MD within a company is invaluable. A doctor, who knows first-hand the needs of MDs,

can ensure the sales and marketing message is clear, correct and adds value.

MDs are also providing the vital link between R&D and marketing. The time a MD can save in clinical trials can help a company gain faster approval of a product and meet the strict requirements of the Ministry of Health Welfare and Labor.

Several MDs currently employed with Pharma companies told me the secrets to their success and offered advice to MDs wanting to enter the pharmaceutical industry.

* To succeed at a Pharma company strong medical knowledge is important but flexibility, leadership, management ability and accountability are also important to succeed.

* Before entering a company, complete your residency training and get some subspecialty training. Get as much experience in clinical practice as you can because it is always useful in the industry. It is difficult to get further direct clinical experience once you are in the industry.

* I recommend that you just try it if you are interested and even if you decide to go back to the hospital after a while, the experiences in industry will make your scope broader.

* Working at a company has transformed me from a mere physician to a scientifically oriented business person through real experience. I have been able to build a strong team. I now help thousands of patients by helping with the approval process.

* Just try. You won't regret your choices. MDs can go back to clinical practices if they feel it is not working out.